4: Hansen E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

DEATH

Hospitals, *xastexâne*, are to be found in provincial towns like Halabjá and Sulaimani and, of course, in the larger cities in the country. In Halabja I found that the male ward only had male nurses. In the villages there was no doctor, only, for example in Sargalu, a trained male nurse with a supply of medicaments for distribution[173]. In regard to the attitude to medical assistance, my interpreter's father refused to allow a doctor to be summoned or for any of the patients in the house to be taken by cab to see one, during the outbreak of Asiatic influenza in Sulaimani in 1957. In the same house my interpreter's mother refused to seek medical aid for rheumatic pains in the back and possibly fever. One of the daughters stood on her back whilst she lay huddled up on the floor and massaged her in this way. A child in Topzawa with fever, who was taken to the small hospital at Dokan on the following day, was the day previous undressed by an elderly woman and smeared over the whole body with freshly-churned butter.

The sick bed in the home is only used when the patient cannot stand up; even influenza patients in Sulaimani were taken on evening visits to the neighbours. For headaches they were given a bandage round the forehead[174], and sufferers often went to sleep in the house where there were guests, reappearing later in the evening. During the influenza epidemic, no measures were taken to isolate the eating and drinking utensils of the sick from those of the rest of the family. Spitting was much resorted to in the courtyard, on the clay roof and on the clay floor[175]. Broken arms and legs were ill tended, grew together badly, resulting in mis-shapen limbs, cases of which I observed with small children both in Sulaimani and Serkan. There was no snake serum in the villages. A harvester in Topzawa and a boy in Balkha who were bitten by snakes were taken by mule and later by hired car or bus a long distance to hospital for treatment. Spraying with DDT was used against vermin in the part of Kurdistan I visited. There letters painted on the walls of houses indicated that this had been done. According to Wilkinson, this spraying is done annually in the villages[176].

Neither the sick nor the dying were isolated even if it was possible to arrange a sickroom in the house.

Burial. No deaths took place among adults in the homes I stayed in in Kurdistan, but outside the mosque at Mirza Rustam I had an opportunity to study the two objects used for the washing and transportation of the dead. The one was an oblong, very large knee-high table with a very heavy top and thick legs on which the corpse was washed. This was lent out for three days to the home where death had taken place and was then returned to the mosque—an understandable arrangement as in this cultural pattern the table is not a settled institution, but an exception. By the side of this laying-out table stood a bier, an oblong, wooden crate with a flat base, low legs and two short carrying poles at each end. This also belonged to the mosque. On this the body, clad in an unsewn costume and wrapped in the cerements, but without a coffin, was transported to the burial ground outside the town[177]. The same type is found in Arabia[178] and Egypt[179].

Two children's deaths, a little girl's and a little boy's, took place among the people I lived with. Even though it was a matter of a child's funeral I observed certain differences, which have their parallels in adult funerals. As soon as death had taken place the child was taken up from its cradle